

Critical Pedagogies: Interpersonal Language and Teacher Development⁹

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that Mexican university teacher-training programmes need to go beyond focusing on developing communicative competence and appropriateness when examining ways to 'teach' L2 interpersonal language use. Teachers need to be more aware of the interpersonal needs of Mexican learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To pursue this argument, I investigate the beliefs and attitudes of teacher trainers and student teachers on BA programmes in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at two Guadalajara universities. I examine whether the pedagogical positions of university teacher trainers and student teachers towards interpersonal language use: a) solely develop linguistic knowledge; b) promote adherence to target-language (TL) communicative norms; or c) offer L2 users interpersonal choices so that they can interact in their own way in a given situation. The results indicate that practising student teachers are trying to identify new ways of responding to their own students' interpersonal language needs. Furthermore, I argue that if teaching EFL in Mexico is to respond to specific local language needs, teacher trainers need to help future and practising teachers develop a more critical stance towards 'teaching' interpersonal language use.

Introduction

Mexican foreign-language teacher trainers shoulder an important responsibility in influencing the pedagogical approaches and practices of future teachers in the classrooms of Mexico. Future teachers are faced with a choice between adopting / adhering to English-language teaching models 'imported' principally from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, or developing teaching principles and practices that respond to local language learning needs. Imported language teaching models often embrace what Scollon and Scollon (1995) identify as utilitarianism -- information-focused communication which emphasises directness, succinctness and efficiency. Under such a model, a limited amount of attention is devoted to developing L2 learners' interpersonal needs. However, a more localised and Mexican-focused approach needs to consider the language learners' background, experiences and motivations so that language programmes will be able to respond to very specific

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and identifiable objectives that will allow L2 users to express themselves as individuals whilst adhering to L2 patterns and practices of use.

Current L2 teaching and learning practices in Mexico must face up to the challenge of helping EFL learners establish, develop, maintain and even enhance social relations in the target language. As a consequence, L2 learners should be offered realistic choices in how to interact within a range of interpersonal contexts which may be friendly and hospitable, impersonal and formal, or unpleasant and conflictual. Through the use of questionnaires, I conducted research on the positions adopted by teacher trainers and their students towards developing interpersonal language use in the L2 classroom. I aim to conceptualise interpersonal choices within Pennycook's (2001) critical framework which explores whether developing second-language use is a matter of a). increasing and practising language knowledge; b). conforming to appropriate interactional norms and patterns of use; or c). making critical choices in often challenging and unpredictable social contexts. For the EFL classroom, Pennycook's framework offers teachers the following options in teaching interpersonal language use: a). increasing and practising language knowledge, which assumes that interpersonal practices are the same in L1 and L2 and that learners need only the necessary linguistic resources; b) conforming to appropriate interactional norms and patterns of use, which assumes that learners need to submit and adhere themselves to target-language practices and patterns of use; and c) making critical choices, which examine how second-language learners can interact as themselves (i.e. as Mexican EFL users) in often challenging and unpredictable social contexts.

This paper promotes a critical pedagogy because it places the Mexican learner at the centre of the learning process and rejects current practices requiring EFL classrooms to adjust, bend or refashion themselves to 'imported' materials, methodologies and evaluation systems. It is the Mexican learner's needs, wants, beliefs, attitudes, experiences and ways of learning and interacting that should be reflected in Mexican EFL pedagogy. This may result in a conflict between the 'imported' methods and Mexican learners' needs, but such a conflict should be resolved in favour of the Mexican EFL learner.

A Mexican Critical Approach

Why is a critical approach to interpersonal language use important for teacher training in Mexico? A critical approach is important if Mexican EFL users are to react decisively to their own English-language needs and requirements. For instance, the language learner studying in Guadalajara has language purposes which cannot always be satisfied through using textbooks and teaching materials developed for a global market. Furthermore, within the Mexican context, the Guadalajara L2 user working for a transnational company may have very different language needs and target-language relationships when compared to the Tijuana EFL user living on the Mexican-United States border where English

may be used in daily interactions. A critical examination of the teaching-learning context needs be described in terms of: a). realistically identifying existing and future interactional and transactional contexts; b). distinguishing between different types of interpersonal relationships; c). pinpointing language and thematic content that is relevant to the Mexican EFL user; d). examining possible communicative choices that allow the Mexican EFL user to interact in her/his own way; e). adhering to and developing existing Mexican learning modes and practices; f). building on existing Mexican teaching approaches and styles; and g). examining ways of evaluating achievement and progress according to local needs and standards.

While such a list may appear idealistic, pretentious and extremely ambitious, it is only through relating English-language teaching to the Mexican context that second-language learning can truly respond to local aims and requirements. For instance, conventional teaching approaches often call on teachers to conduct a needs analysis with the aim of identifying motivational reasons for studying English, e.g. getting a better job, wanting to travel or work in an English-speaking country or interacting with people from another country. This may not be the reality for hundreds of thousands of Mexican students who are studying English solely because it is a required course subject. Motivation 'labels' such as *intrinsic*, *extrinsic*, *instrumental* and *integrative* may fail to reflect classroom realities if learners are only studying English in order to pass an internationally-recognised examination so that they can graduate from their university or if students are studying English in order to socialise and make friends -- what Allwright terms "getting along" as opposed to "getting ahead" (1998: 126). Using the second-language classroom as a real-life social context may be much more realistic for many Mexican learners rather than reproducing textbook target-language role-plays.

Teaching responses to social needs

In responding to the Mexican learners' social needs, English-language teachers have choices in trying to help learners establish, develop, maintain and enhance social relations in a second language. Pedagogical choices can be seen through the adoption of linguistic, liberal or critical positions regarding language and knowledge (Pennycook 2001). From a linguistic position, teachers may decide that interpersonal language use does not have to be taught and that learners only need the necessary grammatical and lexical knowledge. Discussion of social and cultural issues is avoided. Phillipson argues that such an apolitical approach 'glorifies' English as the language of wider communication which offers "science and technology, modernity, efficiency, rationality, progress, a great civilization" (1992: 284). Such non-critical approaches try to distance English language teaching from the socio-political and economic agendas of Anglo-American countries. In fact, as Canagarajah argues, non-critical approaches try to project a liberating role for English-language teachers: "Since mainstream pedagogues

assume that learning is value-free, pragmatic, and autonomous, they can practice teaching as an innocent and practical activity of passing on correct facts, truths, and skills to students" (1999: 17).

In order to respond to the Mexican context, more 'enlightened' teachers may adopt a liberal position (Pennycook 2001) so that L2 interpersonal language use reflects similarities, differences and contrasts, which need to be analysed, understood, appreciated and maybe even celebrated. This liberal position is often pursued by teaching L2 learners an 'appropriate' language use that is sensitive to other participants, situations and language purposes. However, as Fairclough (1992: 48) argues, appropriacy is not only a difficult concept to describe but often reflects the practices and patterns of use of a dominant sector of society. In the case of the L2 users, appropriacy may mean adhering to the dominating practices of middle-class Anglo-American white speakers as teachers ignore possible social issues of power and inequality involved in L2 interpersonal language use. Such a position fails to consider that the L2 users may be at a serious disadvantage when interacting interpersonally because of the overwhelming pressure to conform to TL patterns of use. This position does not entertain the idea of unequal power relations between native and non-native speakers or even among non-native speakers interacting in English.

The critical position tries to respond to the problem of unequal power relations and sees L2 interpersonal language use as problematic. First of all, EFL users may want to conform to target-language patterns and practices but, at the same time, they may want to interact in their own way. They want to be fluent Mexican EFL users and not imitators of U.S. and British language users. Also, second-language interpersonal language use does not reflect a level communicative playing field. The EFL user may feel communicatively disempowered if she/he does not speak the standard variety and has limited knowledge and experience of target-language socio-cultural practices. At the same time, she/he may feel doubly alienated as she/he cannot call on her first-language experiences, values and understandings. As a consequence, Pennycook argues that second-language learning involves social, cultural, political, and ideological concerns (2001: 117). L2 users need help in examining available interactional choices in order to be successful second-language users and interact in their own way.

Importance of Interpersonal Language Use

Teacher trainers need to offer future EFL teachers ways to help their language learners achieve specific language objectives and/or engage in social language use. These goals are often discussed in terms of transactional and interactional language use, which Nunan differentiates in the following way: "Most interactions can be classified as either transactional or interactional. Transactional talk is produced in order to get something, or to get something

done. Interactional language is produced for social purposes" (1999: 228). While Nunan's distinction focuses on language purpose, teachers also need to take into consideration *how* interactants want to interact in interpersonal terms or what Spencer-Oatey refers to as 'rapport-management' (2000). For instance, within the speech act of refusal, Spencer-Oatey argues that the speaker has several options:

1. Explicit refusal, e.g. *I can't make it.*
2. Expression of appreciation, e.g. *Thanks for the invitation.*
3. Excuse or explanation, e.g. *I'm busy.*
4. Expression of regret, e.g. *I'm sorry.*
5. Expression of positive feelings or wishes, e.g. *It sounds like fun / I wish I could make it.*
6. A conditional, e.g. *If you had told me earlier, I could have gone with you.*
7. Offer of an alternative, e.g. *How about Sunday?*
8. Request for further information, e.g. *Who'll be there?*
9. Repetition, e.g. *Dinner on Sunday. Well, thanks very much, but ...*

(ibid: 23)

EFL users are faced with interpersonal choices in both transactional and interactional language use. Interactional language use is not static: it involves joint interaction as relationships develop, enhance, go off course, deteriorate, or become lost. Textbooks which aim to satisfy a global market hardly consider the Mexican EFL user who wants to interact in her/his own way in the target language. The research in this paper specifically examines whether or not Mexican teacher trainers (Mexican and non-Mexican teacher trainers working in Mexico) seek to encourage future teachers to respond to the challenge of helping Mexican learners interact interpersonally in their own way.

Research Questions

In order to conduct this investigation, which includes a consideration of whether teacher trainers and student teachers hold linguistic, liberal or critical positions towards the teaching of interpersonal language use, I pursue one overarching research question: ***How can EFL teachers help learners engage in interpersonal language use in the target language?*** This question is relevant to both teacher trainers and student teachers. Teacher trainers need to consider how they can prepare student teachers for 'teaching' interpersonal language use and student teachers need to be made aware of how they can help L2 learners. To pursue this line of enquiry, I posed five specific questions in the questionnaire given to teacher trainers and student teachers.

1. Do teachers need to teach learners how to socialise in the L2?

With this question, I wanted to find out whether interpersonal language needs to be taught at all. Questionnaire participants (teacher trainers and student teachers) were given three choices regarding the need to 'teach' interpersonal language: i). interpersonal language use does not need to be taught and learners only require experience and practice; ii). L2 interpersonal language use reflects similarities and differences between L1 and L2 and these need to be highlighted, understood and even celebrated; or iii). interpersonal language use involves interactional choices as L2 users decide how to achieve their own personal objectives.

2. How should teachers approach the teaching of social language?

If teacher intervention would be necessary, the second question tried to ascertain the nature of such teacher intervention. In this question, I tried to determine whether 'teaching' interpersonal language use is about i). developing linguistic skills (e.g. grammar and vocabulary); ii). developing communicative competence and conforming to native-like patterns; or iii). providing learners with interactional options so that can participate in their own way according to their communicative purpose.

3. Are even proficient L2 users at a possible conversational disadvantage when interacting in the target language?

Since I wanted to ascertain whether teacher trainers and student teachers view L1-L2 interaction as problematic, the third question explored whether linguistic knowledge is enough to achieve successful L2.

4. Should L2 users be taught to always conform to TL interaction practices?

Besides developing the learners' linguistic knowledge, I also wanted to know how L2 users can be prepared to interact in target-language situations. I was interested in knowing whether L2 users should adhere to TL norms or possibly pursue another way of interacting. Adherence to norms implies the subservience to second-language patterns and practices.

5. Should L2 users be 'taught' to be impolite in a second language?

I was also interested in knowing whether learners should sometimes be given the necessary knowledge and means to choose not to conform to TL norms. Therefore, my final question examined whether second language users should be given the means to assert themselves in impolite ways.

Locating the Research

This research focuses on the two universities in Guadalajara which currently offer a BA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL): *Universidad de Guadalajara* (U de G) which offers an eight-semester programme and *Universidad del Valle de Atemajac* (UNIVA) which runs a modular nine-quarter programme. The U de G's BA in TEFL has approximately 90 students with a staff of 15 teachers; the UNIVA programme has 15 students and five teachers. Both programmes prepare teachers to work in universities, high schools, middle schools as well as in private language institutions.

Methodology

In this research project, I am interested in identifying teacher trainer and student teacher attitudes rather than describing actual practices. Therefore, I decided to examine interpersonal language use through the use of questionnaires. As Scott & Usher (1999: 67) argue, questionnaires aim to provide researchers with a large sample of standardised information. Such information can be analysed for frequency counts or underlying relationships between the respondents' answers. However, this study is mainly a qualitative study where I am interested in examining and taking into consideration a range of responses rather than in trying to find an 'average' attitude.

However, a quantitative dimension to the study can be observed, as I analysed the results of 15 questionnaires given to the teacher trainers and 73 questionnaires to student teachers. I received back 14 questionnaires from teacher trainers and 45 from student teachers. All 14 teacher trainers had more than four years' experience teaching at the university level. Twelve of the teacher trainers were Mexican. Eleven held a BA in TEFL; and nine had an MA in TEFL. Of the 45 student teachers who responded, 37 were studying in the U de G (20 in their first semester and 17 in their third semester); and eight were studying at UNIVA.

Results

1. Do teachers need to teach learners how to socialise in the L2?

Teachers were divided as to whether second-language socialisation is about understanding L1 and L2 similarities, variations and differences, or whether it involves interacting in individual and personal ways. By comparison, more student teachers appeared to firmly believe that socialisation involves understanding similarities, variations and differences.

	1	2	3	Other
	Interpersonal language use comes through experience and practice	Interpersonal language use = understanding similarities, variations & differences	Interpersonal language use = interacting in individual & personal ways	Both 2 & 3
Teacher trainers	0	6	6	2
Student teachers	2	36	7	

2. How should teachers approach the teaching of social language?

When it comes to examining possible classroom approaches to promoting L2 socialisation, the teacher trainers' answers ranged across the three options: developing linguistic skills, developing communicative competence and offering creative and conventional choices. While student teachers' responses also reflected a wide range of answers, there was a notable preference for the need to develop communicative competence.

	Socialisation involves developing linguistic skills	Socialisation involves developing communicative competence	Socialisation involves offering creative & conventional choices
Teacher trainers	3	6	3
Student teachers	10	22	13

3. Are even proficient L2 users at a possible conversational disadvantage when interacting in the target language?

Teacher trainers once again offered a range of answers. By comparison, the student teachers' answers seemed to strongly/generally agree with the proposition.

	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Unsure	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher trainers	1	6	3	4	1
Student teachers	3	23	9	7	3

4. Should L2 users be taught to always conform to TL interaction practices?

Teacher trainers tended to strongly agree or generally agree with the proposition. The student teachers' answers were mixed but tended to agree with the proposition. The significant number of 'unsure' answers from student teachers may indicate that they had pedagogical doubts or, perhaps, they had never seriously considered the issue.

	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Unsure	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher trainers	3	4	3	1	1
Student teachers	2	18	10	8	6

5. Should L2 users be 'taught' to be impolite in a second language?

In the final question, both teacher trainers and teachers were completely divided as to whether language learners should be 'taught' to be impolite, if necessary, in the target language.

	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Unsure	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
Teacher trainers	0	5	3	1	3
Student teachers	4	13	7	10	10

Discussion

The results of the questionnaire indicate that teacher trainers do not have a unified approach towards the teaching of interpersonal language use. An initial and summary reaction to the data suggests that there is a healthy diversity of opinions among teacher trainers and students. Both BA programmes appear to promote pedagogical plurality and accept different positions towards the 'teaching' of interpersonal language use.

A closer examination initially indicates that student teachers reflect a liberal position to language teaching. For instance, in the first question, 36 student teachers believe that socialisation involves understanding similarities, variations and differences. Such answers reflect the teaching of appropriateness, as student teachers believe language learners should seek accommodation in EFL

use rather than look for their own ways of expressing themselves. In contrast, teacher trainer answers reveal a range of linguistic, liberal and critical positions to interpersonal language use.

The liberal position to L2 interpersonal language use, as suggested by the answers to question one, is not reflected to the same degree in the answers to question two. Student teachers' answers regarding how teachers should approach the teaching of social language also reflect both linguistic and critical positions that embrace developing linguistic skills, developing communicative competence and offering creative and conventional choices; a similar pattern of answers is reflected by the teacher trainers. Such a diversity of answers may suggest that some student teachers question the notion of communicative competence and seek out other ways to understand similarities, variations and differences between L1 and L2.

The need for a more critical position towards developing successful social relations appears to be reflected in the student teachers' answers to question three, as the responses raise the possibility that attaining communicative competence does not necessarily help L2 learners achieve successful social relations: 29 students strongly or generally agree that learners are at a disadvantage when conversing in the target language and that this disadvantage cannot be wholly accounted for in linguistic terms.

A possible need to adopt a more critical position also appears to be reflected in the answers to question four. L2 communicative competence involves accommodation and appropriateness; and the answers of the teacher trainers and student teachers suggest that they are not wholly convinced that language learners should be taught to conform to target language patterns and practices. Student teachers may be seeking another way to achieve successful socialisation in the target language.

With regard to the final question, there is a diversity of opinions about whether language learners should be 'taught' to be impolite in the target language, as the answers embrace linguistic, liberal and critical positions. Obviously, further research needs to consider in detail teacher trainers' and student teachers' understandings and perceptions of impoliteness. Nevertheless, teaching impoliteness sends a strong signal to language learners that they are not always expected to conform to second-language patterns and practices. The 5 teacher trainers who agree and 17 student teachers who strongly or generally agree that learners should be taught to be impolite appear to support the notion that language learners should be offered a wide variety of ways of interacting in the target language.

Conclusions

While the results of the questionnaire reflected a range of linguistic, liberal and critical positions, there was an underlining tendency to question existing positions towards the teaching of interpersonal language use: responses indicated that learners can be at a disadvantage when interacting in the target language and doubts were raised about the need for absolute conformity to TL patterns and practices. One conclusion from this study is that teacher trainers should reflect more closely on the effect of their teaching on their student teachers, given the wide divergence between teacher trainer and student teacher answers. More importantly, although student teacher responses indicate that they often see L2 socialisation in terms of understanding similarities, variations and differences, follow-up answers suggest that student teachers believe that second-language interpersonal language teaching needs to go beyond achieving communicative competence and conforming to target language patterns and practices. Student teachers are perhaps looking for their own way to promote L2 interpersonal language use -- one that examines similarities, variations and differences but also responds to the problems of language disadvantage and conformance to target language patterns. These tentative findings indicate that teacher trainers need to offer critical approaches towards promoting L2 socialisation rather than reproducing conventional models that emphasise accommodation and appropriateness.

Obviously further research needs to be carried out to define teacher trainers' and student teachers' understandings of linguistic, liberal and critical approaches to second-language use. Furthermore, I have not explored the teacher trainers' and the student teachers' understandings of the terms *communicative competence* and *appropriacy*. However, this paper has made an initial contribution by identifying the problem of promoting L2 interpersonal language use in the classroom. Furthermore, I believe that the research findings have implications for other areas of L2 teaching and learning where concepts of communicative competence and appropriacy may not be responding to Mexico's own second-language needs.

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